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The Ladder: How choosing curiosity over cash paid off for Orion's CEO
By Rob Burgess
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Today, Natalie Wolfsen is CEO of Orion Advisor Solutions, but years ago, her future was less clear after a business she had co-founded went under.Courtesy photo; design by Sena Kwon
Welcome to the latest installment of The Ladder, a series by Financial Planning that looks at how executives and leaders in the wealth management industry made it to where they are today — and what you can learn from them.

It was early 1999, and Natalie Wolfsen was at a crossroads.

She had begun her career four years earlier in New York City as an analyst for Douglas Smith Management Consulting and then moved to American Express, where she worked in payments as a senior marketing manager and senior marketing analyst. In the fall of 1998, she left to co-found a tech startup, Invenet, which "pretty quickly failed" after just six months.

Wolfsen said she decided to use the opportunity to move back to the San Francisco Bay Area.

At this point, she found herself with a decision to make.

"I had a lot of job offers, and I had to choose between whether or not I wanted to take less money and go into a new part of the industry, brokerage, or if I wanted to stay in payments and make more money," she said. "It was extremely pivotal for me because I had to decide whether I was going to go with my interest or my wallet."

In the end, she chose to follow her own curiosity — a decision that Wolfsen said paid off.

"I was very interested in the brokerage part of the industry, wealth management and financial instruments, but I knew almost nothing about it," she said.

Wolfsen said selecting that path was one of the things that propelled her to her current and most recent roles as CEO.

"When you're interested in what you're doing and you're excited by it, the monetary rewards, they come," she said. It took only about a year in her new role for Wolfsen's pay to "equalize" to where it had been before, she said — a feat she credits to the fact that she was "having so much fun."

"I don't know that my career would have accelerated forward as quickly as it did if I had stayed in payments, because I just wasn't as interested."

In the years since, Wolfsen's star continued to rise in the wealth management industry.

After the failure of Invenet, she spent a decade with Charles Schwab in roles including vice president of product development, strategy and segment management. She then spent two and a half years at Pershing as managing director and head of product management and development. From there, she spent over two years as senior vice president and head of marketing and product development at First Eagle Investment Management. In 2014, she began a nearly decade-long stint with California TAMP AssetMark, first as chief commercialization officer and executive vice president, then chief solutions officer and executive vice president and finally in 2021 as CEO.

And last year, after Orion Advisor Solutions CEO Eric Clarke announced he would be stepping down from his post, Wolfsen was named as his successor.

"When young folks ask me, 'What is the most important thing?' I always say, 'Pick an industry that's growing, and pick an industry that you're fascinated by.' Because if you have both of those two elements, great careers will follow if you work hard," she said.